

Committee on Resources

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Testimony of:

Dorothy Oxendine

National President

American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.

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Subcommittee on National Parks,

Recreation, and Public Lands

Legislative Field Hearing on H.R. 1442

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. It is an honor to be here. This historic Hearing at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is noteworthy and important. I am Dorothy Oxendine, National President of the American Gold Star Mothers – mothers who lost their sons in all wars including Vietnam.

We meet today at a sacred place – a place where veterans and family members come to remember and, often, to mourn. This is a place where love is shown – love for those lost in Vietnam.

Patriotic men and women answered the call there – just as they did at Normandy Beach, at Yorktown and at Gettysburg. In a profound sense this is a resting place for those who did not return – they are together here.

Etched row upon row they serve our nation still today. They serve to remind Americans of the price of freedom. And Americans are moved here. I am a Christian. I take solace in the words: "No greater love has any man than to lay down his life for his friends."

I am moved by the words of Major General David Grange. He wrote these eloquent words about his visits to The Wall: "I whisper with tears in my eyes to the names on The Wall, 'Thanks, you that have fallen, you made a difference then...and now.'"

They do make a difference now. And that is why we are here today.

So let us move to the issue of the Visitor Center. The Memorial is obviously very powerful. Yet if the Memorial is to do its job, it must reach out to America's youth. And that is why we need to see the Visitor Center at the Memorial. This hearing is about the future. The future of this Memorial as an educational tool.

Inside of the Visitor Center will be photographs. Photographs of those enshrined here. I can picture it right now. A group of school kids is in the Center. They look at the photos of young Americans nearly their age. When they see these photographs they will journey to The Wall. And The Wall will really have an impact – a memorable impact.

Willie Oxendine III is upon this Wall. Willie, my son, gave his life on May 30, 1968. I will live long enough to see his photograph in this Visitor Center.

While there will not be a Willie Oxendine IV, Willie will live on by inspiring young Americans. They will see his photograph. They will be moved. We hope they will be stirred to learn more about the Vietnam War and leave with a greater interest in American history.

We are today mindful of the past. Yet we keep an eye toward the future. Today we express our commitment to our Nation's youth and the message of patriotism and sacrifice that will be a part of this Visitor Center.

We share your commitment as is evidenced by this Hearing today.

We salute the wisdom of the Committee and look forward to speedy passage of H.R.1442.

Gentlemen, thank you for hearing my testimony today.

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